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Mongolian People's Republic (MPR)

Review of two Soviet Texts Titled "The Mongolian People's Republic--A Country of New Democracy, An Outline of History" and "The Mongolian People's Republic, A Physical Geographic Description"

1950 and 1948, respectively

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1. Ia Zlatkin, Mongol's skola Narodnaia Respublika - Strana Novoi Demokratii. Ocherk Istorii (Mongolian People's Republic - A Country of the New Democracy, An Outline of History), edited by the Academician I M Maiski, Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Scientific and Popular Series, Moscow-Leningrad, 1950, 290 pages with two maps.
2. Reviewer's Remarks:

The title of this book tells us that this is a propaganda book -- a brief history of a Soviet Satellite. The author of the book is not known in scientific circles. The editor is Maiski who, in the first few years of the Soviet regime, was a chairman of the Siberian division of the cooperative "Centrosyuz." Later on, he was appointed ambassador to UK and was elected a full member of the Academy of Sciences a few years ago. The book is for mass general reading.
3. In Maiski's preface (p 3 - 10) the very naive statement is made that 30 years ago the only means of transportation were horses and camels, while now there are automobiles and railroads. I think the same could be said of the US -- in olden days people rode horseback and now every third person has an automobile.
4. The introduction (p 11 - 62) contains a short history of MPR since the beginning of the Manchu domination until the Chinese revolution in 1911. This chapter does not contain anything new, being written on the basis of books in Russian language. No original Mongolian or Chinese sources are quoted. The very large Western literature (e g "History of Mongols" by Howorth in four volumes; Baddley - "Mongolia, Russia, and China" in two volumes, etc) is not mentioned at all. The Mongolian social organization in the 1917 Revolution is regarded as feudal. The author repeats here the doubtful theory of Vladimirsov (1933). The oppression of the Mongols by the Manchus is exaggerated by Zlatkin. He mentions only negative phenomena, but he passes with silence over such privileges of the Mongols as: full independence of the princes in their

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principalities, unlimited religious freedom for the Mongols, privileges granted to the clergy by the Manchu authorities, the prohibition of Chinese immigration, prohibition for the Chinese to take their wives and families to MPR etc.

5. The first chapter (p 63 - 112) deals with the national liberation struggle of the Mongols at the time of the autonomy (1911 - 1919), with the Tzarist Russian policies toward MPR, and with the events in 1911 (Chinese revolution). This chapter does not contain great mistakes or distortions as do some other chapters.
6. The second chapter is "The Revolution of 1921 and the Formation of the People's Republic (p 113 - 157). This is a very typical example of forgery of history with the purpose of propaganda. It contains brazen lies and abominable distortions. Zlatkin mentions as the only founders of the Mongolian People's Party Sukhe Bator and Choibalsang (p 122), while in reality the party was founded 1921, in Maimacheng (it is Altan Bulak now) near the Soviet frontier, by the following persons: Bodo, Danzang, Zhantsarano, Tseren Dorji, Toktokho, and other persons. Neither Sukhe Bator nor Choibalsang were present at the time of the foundation of the party.
7. When the newly created party manifested her leftist-radical tendencies as early as 1922, Bodo, one of the founders of the party, was greatly dissatisfied with the new line and created his own fraction group within the party. To that group, among others, also Toktokho, Dja Lama, Shakdurjab, and other persons belonged. All of them were arrested and shot by order of Elbek-Dorji Rinchino, a Buriat, a former Soviet subject and student of the St Petersburg University. He had been a revolutionary socialist (SR) in USSR prior to his arrival in MPR. He had joined the People's Party very soon after its foundation and became the Red boss of MPR and secretary-general of the MPR People's Party. Rinchino was later on removed from MPR and sent to Moscow to teach and "be re-educated" at the Stalin University of the Toilers of the East. Rinchino was arrested and shot in 1937 as a "Trotskyite, leftist deviationist, enemy of the people, and an old Japanese secret agent." As stated, Bodo and his fellow members of the "rightist wing" were shot. The accusation was: Zlatkin calls him "an old agent of the Tzarist and later on Japanese secret service" (p 147), an accusation which has become trivial and does not impress anybody, because it is made also against everybody noncommunist in all the Satellite states with the difference that sometimes the persons concerned are accused of being US or UK agents.
8. The adventurer Dja-Lama, who was fighting the Reds after he had first joined them, was also executed. To what Zlatkin says I can add that Dja-Lama was beheaded and his head, smoked and salted, was sent to Leningrad in 1923 and presented to the Anthropologic Museum of the Academy of Sciences in 1923, one year after the execution. The year 1922 is also remarkable from that viewpoint that then the MPR secret police, an MPR replica of the GPU, was created. Its abbreviation name was GVO - the initials of the Russian words Gosudarstvennaia Vnutrenniaia Okhrana ("The Internal Defence of the State").
9. The hero of the Mongolian revolution, the chieftain of the partisans Sukhe Bator, died under mysterious circumstances on 19 Feb 23. Zlatkin mentions that Choibalsang had said in December 1940 (i.e. 17 years later) that Sukhe Bator had been poisoned by Danzang (p 148), because the latter had been "a Tzarist and Japanese secret agent." The most amazing thing is that Zlatkin does not explain to the reader how it was possible that this poisoning had been disclosed only after 17 years, no post-mortem having been made immediately after Sukhe Bator's death. Thus, this too is a forgery and a brazen lie. I remember that in 1923 Mongolian lamas were made responsible for having treated him with wrong medicine, because Sukhe Bator, being an old-time Mongol did not care for European medicine and preferred lama quacks.
10. In the same chapter the resolution of the Third Party Congress is discussed, which had outlined the new party general line and put the foundation for the new

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"road of noncapitalistic development," i.e. socialist and communist development (p 150). Although the People's Party was officially a peoples' and not a communist party, it belonged to the Comintern from the very beginning, being one of the member-parties of the Communist International.

11. The third chapter is entitled "The struggle for the general line of the Mongolian People's Party against the rightist and leftist restorers of feudalism and the colonial slavery in 1924 - 1932" (pages 160 ff). Here we learn that the most dangerous enemies of the People's Party and Republic were the Japanese and the Mongolian clergy. These two are not incidentally mentioned together, because in 1924 the first great drive against religion was started and Zlatkin needs a justification of the measures taken against the lamas. He tries to demonstrate that the lamas were enemies of the regime and the people, being mercenary agents of the Japanese. The lamas were accused by Zlatkin of being Japanese subversive agents and spies, an accusation very familiar to everybody engaged in research on the Soviet satellites. The clergy is always accused of being spies (of US, UK, etc), no matter whether they are Hungarian Roman Catholic priests, or Cardinal Stepinac in Yugoslavia, or Protestant pastors in Eastern Germany.
12. The "Rightists" also started their "subversive" activities in 1924 - 1925. Their sabotage manifested itself in that the then Minister of Education, Erdeni Batukhan, sent Mongol students to study in Germany and France. I knew Batukhan well, because later on he was exiled to USSR and became a teacher of Mongolian at the Leningrad Oriental Institute, actually subordinate to me. He told me that the only reason for sending young Mongols to Europe was that in USSR the housing and food problem was so precarious that the young Mongols contracted tuberculosis in the damp Leningrad climate after having stayed there more than six weeks. I can confirm this, because at least four Mongols and one Tibetan died in 1922 - 1924 in Leningrad. These were the first students to be trained abroad. Erdeni Batukhan was arrested in Leningrad and sent to a concentration camp in 1937, whence I got a letter from him through the underground in 1938. Then he was starving to death and implored me to do something for him, but of course this was impossible. His family was slowly dying in MPR. Most of the students who had come back from Europe were arrested and destroyed in 1935 - 1937, among them Gombojab Merguengoon, son of a little prince, who had studied in France under the very famous professor of Oriental studies, Paul Pelliot. All these things are lacking in Zlatkin's book. I think this should be added here in order to tell the truth about what happened at that time in MPR.
13. The time between 1924 and 1932 was a period of never ending purges. Zlatkin does not speak of purges. He merely mentions that out of 373 chairmen of the Khoshun administrations (district administrations) 79 had been former feudals. He does not say what this label means. In reality it means that all of them had been removed, arrested, destroyed immediately or slowly killed in concentration camps. In 1928 also the Institute of the Living Buddhas was abolished and it was strictly forbidden to proclaim new rebirths of saints (p 187). Zlatkin does not tell us what this means. He says "it was forbidden" or "abolished." It would not have been half so bad if it had been simply forbidden, just as we forbid making a U-turn in the middle of New York's Broadway. In reality it meant that all lamas involved in this Institute of Living Buddhas were imprisoned. They were usually sent to concentration camps in the Turukhanak area in Siberia.
14. In 1929 the "Leftists" started their subversive activities. The reader already has noticed that the book of Zlatkin is a sort of salad with everything in it: Japanese agents, Tsarist agents, "Rightists," "Leftists" and I do not know what more, a real Pandora box with all sorts of surprises. But as strange as it may sound, Zlatkin does not mention a single name of leftist leaders. What is the matter here? The answer is very simple: there were no leftist leaders, there were no Titoists as Owen Lattimore calls them, taking his information from all sorts of Zlatkins. In reality the "leftist" line was a consequence of the direct fulfillment of the orders coming from the Comintern. The MPR government had no other way but to comply with the line dictated to them by the Soviet Comintern

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representatives: first was Ryskulov, later on came Matthew Amagaieff. The latter was removed in 1931 from MPR and sent to Moscow to work at the Toilers' University. Later on, in 1934 or 1935, Amagaieff was appointed director of the Leningrad Institute of Oriental Languages, thus becoming my boss. He was arrested in 1937 and shot as a Trotskyite.

15. Simultaneously with the leftists the lamas became, according to Zlatkin, very active. He mentions Yegudzer, Mandzushri, Delib, and a few others, (p 193). The accusation that these men were Japanese agents is untrue. I knew Mandzushri personally and I know that he was only one of the Living Buddhas absolutely not participating in any worldly affairs. In reality Zlatkin again needs here a justification of the anti-religious activities of the Soviets. The man called Delib by Zlatkin is in reality Dilowa Khutuktu. Dilowa was also arrested. While Mandzushri, Yegudzer, and the others (they were 27 Living Buddhas) were shot, Dilowa sat in his death cell in Ulan Bator and managed to escape. He was helped by his friends who took him out of prison, gave him a camel and sent him away across the desert into China. There Dilowa was met by Owen Lattimore a few years later and taken to the US. He told me the whole story and it is absolutely obvious that what Zlatkin says is a brazen lie.
16. The activities of these "lama cliques," spies, subversive agents, etc resulted in creation of various "reactionary groups." So Zlatkin calls them. But in reality they were not "groups"; it was the entire population including many party members and even large units of the MPR Red Army which revolted against the intolerable conditions created by the regime. This revolt in 1932 was crushed by Soviet Red Army units which were brought with their planes and tanks.
17. Of course, the Comintern could not be accused of these "leftist deviations" from the general line. Somebody had to be blamed. Thus the legend about a "leftist group" in MPR was created. The government which simply had had to comply with the policies imposed upon them by the Comintern, was arrested and tried. These were: Gendung, the chairman of the government; Amor the prime minister and foreign minister; and many other people. They were accused of being Japanese agents and spies, and executed. This happened in 1936. At that time MPR definitely became a Soviet satellite, after her government had been destroyed and Soviet creatures came to power.
18. The fourth chapter is "The Mongolian People's Republic stands firmly on the road of the noncapitalistic development" (p 206 ff). Here Zlatkin tells about the liquidation and the consequences of the subversive activities of the leftists.
19. The remaining pages of the book discuss the events during World War II and the participation of MPR troops in war against Japan in fall 1945.
20. To conclude this review we should remark that Zlatkin's book gives a greatly distorted picture of Mongolia. Unfortunately only one who knows MPR from his own experience can find out about this. It is a bad book.
21. E M Murzayev, The Mongolian People's Republic, A Physical Geographic Description, Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Institute of Geography, State Publishing House, Moscow, 1948, 314 pages with numerous pictures and maps. (In Russian)
22. Reviewer's Comments:

While there are numerous descriptions of MPR and many special works on geology, botany, zoology of that country, etc, there was no general geographic work on the MPR. This explains while knowledge of MPR outside of the USSR is so little and even the Encyclopaedia Britannica contains numerous inaccuracies in her articles on MPR. Murzayev's book is an important achievement and it is an accurate and thorough work.

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23. The first chapter of the book is entitled "General Geographic Characteristic." Here we find data on the square mileage and the co-ordinates of geographic points, boundaries are described, etc (p 7 - 10). It should be noted that MPR is from the point of view of geographic research very interesting, because here in winter lies the center of the atmospheric high pressure for the whole world. MPR is the most southern area in the world where there is never melting ice in the soil (47 degree of Northern Latitude). MPR has also the most northern dry deserts in the whole world (in the depression of the Big Lakes in Western Mongolia, i.e. 50°5' of the Northern latitude). MPR has also one of the most continental climates in the world. This chapter is followed by a brief analysis of MPR place names which might be of importance to readers who do not know MPR, although it is not as good as the work by V A Kazakevich: Modern Mongolian Toponymy (In Russian), Leningrad, 1934.
24. The brief "Data on the governmental organization, the populations, and economy" (p 18 - 36 are of interest only to readers who know little of MPR). Otherwise these data are too brief and fragmentary. Contrary, "The History of Geographic Exploration" looks interesting to me (p 36 - 58). It contains a survey of all travels ever made in MPR since the 13th century (the monks Plano Carpini, Rubruk, and the merchant Marco Polo, etc). Although this survey is more or less complete, some data is missing, e.g. nowhere is the travel by the Taoist monk Ch'an-Ch'un (at the time of Genghis Khan) mentioned which has been described by the Soviet scholar Palladius and the German Bretschneider. Modern time is better discussed, although here, too, the important work by Baddley, "Russia, Mongolia, and China" is not mentioned, although it contains mention of some important trips to MPR. The Jesuits are only mentioned and no more is said about them than "they have done incomparably less than the Russian scholars" (p 45). The Soviet scholars who were destroyed by the Soviets are not mentioned, of course, e.g. Trokt Bedmashapov, a Buriat Cossack noncommissioned officer who traveled with Kozlov and discovered the famous ruins of Khara Khoto, or A D Simukov, a geographer who worked in the MPR Scientific Committee in Ulan Bator. Both were arrested and murdered by the Soviet Secret Police in 1937.
25. The chapter "Outlines of the Surface Structure" (p 58 ff) is important and interesting. Here we learn something of the altitudes of MPR: the lowest altitude (from the ocean level) is the dry lake Koke Nur in northeastern MPR (532 meters). The highest altitude is the mountain Khuitun in the mountain group Tabun Bogdo in the Altai range. It is 4,653 meters. The average altitude of MPR is 1,580 meters. Ulan Bator, the capital of the MPR lies on an altitude of 1,297 meters (p 59). This chapter contains also geological data, although soil riches or any ore deposits are not mentioned. It should be pointed out that the desert character of the MPR is greatly exaggerated by outsiders and Murzaev tells us that of the total square kilometrage of MPR (1,531,000 square kilometers) only 29,916 square kilometers (or 1.96%) are sands.
26. A very interesting survey of the periods of the origin of the landscape is found on p 78 ff. The author says that:
- a. The continental character of MPR started during the Palaeozoic era and this process continued during the Mesozoic era;
 - b. During the latter era and in the Tertiary the river and lake system of MPR was greatly developed;
 - c. An important event was the coming into existence of new mountain ranges (at the end of the Tertiary and at the beginning of the Quarternary). The deserts are old in MPR, because during the chalk period (i.e. since the beginning of the Quarternary) the climate became very dry. The dryness of the climate is a result of the rise of the mountains which after coming into existence prevented the monsoons from entering MPR.
27. Very interesting is the chapter about the climate in which data on precipitation, temperatures, winds, and the seasons are given. This chapter is followed by a

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chapter about the rivers and lakes (p 115 - 125) and about the geographic zones. There are the following zones:

- a. mountain-forest-steppe-zone,
- b. high steppe zone,
- c. semi-desert and desert-steppe zone,
- d. desert zone.

These zones are described very thoroughly and their animals and vegetation are discussed very well.

- 28. This is followed by a description of the physical-geographic areas of MPR: the Altai mountain area; the Great Lake Depression; the Khangai and Kentei mountain ranges; the high plains and the Gobi area.
- 29. An index of literature and an index of geographic names conclude the book.
- 30. To conclude this review I should say that this thorough work (at least, it is the most thorough of all) can be recommended to readers as a reliable book. I think also that it should be translated into English.

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